

*ELEGANT
CONTAINERS~
ANTIQUÉ
TO MODERN*

*Splendor
&
Surprise*

HILLWOOD
ESTATE, MUSEUM & GARDENS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hi-res images available upon request

Special exhibition explores the history and extraordinary craftsmanship of containers and the role they have played in holding treasured and everyday objects

February 15-June 7, 2015

WASHINGTON—A world of treasures is opened when Hillwood Estate, Museum & Gardens presents *Splendor and Surprise: Elegant Containers, Antique to Modern* from February 15 to June 7, 2015. More than 80 remarkable boxes, coffers, chests, and other containers reveal the beautiful and unexpected ways that cultures have contained their most treasured items and everyday objects from the 17th through the 20th century.

From reliquaries to jewelry safes to perfume bottles, the containers in which we put things have always been an important part of everyday life. Hillwood founder Marjorie Merriweather Post valued precious boxes and similar objects for their exquisite designs and historic associations. Along with additional loans, this exhibition comprises the most significant examples from the hundreds of decorative boxes that are in Hillwood's collection today. The forms and functions these objects have taken over time and their rich and often elaborate decoration illustrate the changes in both social practices and artistic development over three centuries in Russia and Western Europe. While most were made for specific uses, such as holding snuff or protecting important items, these finely crafted containers are also valued art objects in their own right, appreciated and collected through the centuries for their practical uses, beauty, and promise for holding treasures and surprises.

(more)



“Since the myth of Pandora, the idea of containers and the secrets of what they contain have fascinated their owners and collectors,” explained Wilfried Zeisler, associate curator of 19th-century art at Hillwood and curator of the exhibition. “By looking at the myriad functions of containers and their elaborate designs and construction, we are offered a lens into changing social and political customs, personal habits and routines, and basic everyday habits in Russia and Western Europe from the early 17th century through the 20th,” Zeisler continued.

Splendor at Hillwood

Marjorie Merriweather Post, who inherited her father’s Postum Cereal Company and fortune in 1914, began collecting art in the 1920s, with a focus on French furniture and decorative art, in line with the trend of the time. Post established herself as a cultivated and discerning collector and when she turned her attention to gold boxes she found they resonated with the criteria she established for collecting: objects had to have great beauty and design, be of extraordinary craftsmanship, and have historic or aristocratic provenances. The French pieces she bought in the 1920s form the core of the collection and she continued acquiring gold boxes throughout her life, including fascinating Russian examples and those made by the firm of Carl Fabergé and Cartier.

“In this exhibition, we use our exquisite collection of gold boxes, all beautiful and finely crafted, with many fascinating back stories, as a foundation for exploring the culture and history of boxes—both inside and out,” explained Hillwood executive director Kate Markert. For the first time, many of the objects on view in the exhibition will be opened for display to reveal the surprising interiors. Animated labels, opening the lid on some of the most intricate objects, will illustrate the inner workings and luxurious insides not typically available to viewers.

Exhibition Highlights

Splendor and Surprise will be organized into seven sections, each exploring a different purpose that containers have served over time. The first reveals the use of containers for sacred objects and rituals. Since the *Ark of the Covenant*, the housing of religious objects has held special meaning. Here, a late 16th to early 17th-century Russian icon depicts St. Cyril of Jerusalem carrying a reliquary—a special receptacle to carry remains. A magnificent French silver coffer with Russian plaques created by the tsars’ Kremlin workshops evokes a reliquary, with religious imagery embellishing its surface.

The second section illustrates the beauty and refinement that characterized containers of even the most practical implements from the 18th through the early 20th centuries. A Louis Vuitton trunk, a must for elegant travelers of the early 20th century, features several compartments and drawers for gloves, ribbons, lingerie, shoes, and hats. A Viennese wooden

box, known as a *nécessaire*, from 1845, intended to hold sets for writing, sewing, and dressing, is decorated with inlay work of shell, mother of pearl, and copper applied in a technique known as *Bouille*, named for André-Charles Bouille, cabinet maker for Louis XIV. From the practical to the extravagant, the next section includes containers that were created purely for presentation and pageantry. Commissioned for their impeccable design, technique and lavish materials, these objects were intended primarily for display in studios and cabinets of curiosities.

The fourth section explores the culture of containers as gifts and presentations, whether between leaders, royalty, or as expressions of affection or love. The snuffbox was the most popular of this type, especially in 18th- and 19th-century France and Russia. The most distinguished presentation boxes featured a portrait of the sovereign. A rare example seen here is a circa 1830 Russian presentation box with miniatures of Emperor Nicholas I and Empress



Alexandra Fedorovna. Next, a display of precious containers illustrates the luxury that was lent to everyday activities. A late 19th-century ivory glove box made in Paris was a gift to Dowager Empress Maria Fedorovna in 1896 during her visit to the city. This fifth section also features delicate perfume bottles, desk sets, snuff boxes, and other containers for tobacco and smoking, made of luxurious materials.

While precious containers, gold boxes, and *étui* are known as *objets de vertu*, the items in section six of the exhibition actually focus on containers more likely associated with vice, such as drinking, smoking, gambling, or illicit love. A vodka service made by the Maltsov Glassworks in Diatkovo, Russia depicts the evils of drinking with beguiling creatures animating sayings such as “Drink, drink, you’ll see devils;” and “Tea, coffee we do not like / as long as there is vodka in the morning.” Finally, several pieces from the late 20th century illustrate how modern artists have found expression by experimenting with the form and decoration of containers. This section includes a box by Joseph Cornell, on loan from the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and a soup tureen by Cindy Sherman.

In the Mansion

As they were when Post resided at Hillwood, hundreds of precious snuff boxes, presentation boxes, jewelry coffers, and other containers are on display throughout the mansion. Highlights

include an 18th-century French jewel cabinet, French gold boxes, and the remarkable Roentgen rolltop desk in the French Drawing Room. In Post's bedroom, small but dramatic objects made of bloodstone call attention to this exotic dark green stone—deriving its name from the flecks of red inclusions—which was Post's birthstone and a favorite material for collecting.

Programs

Three educational programs will offer additional opportunities to learn about the history and meaning of precious containers in March. On March 17, a [lecture and object study](#) with Wilfried Zeisler will enable close looking, through the use of video, at some of the most precious objects from the exhibition. On Tuesday, March 24, Danielle Kisluk-Grosheide, curator in the department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, will present the lecture [Box Beautiful](#). On Tuesday, March 31, the lecture and film screening [Fabergé: A Life of Its Own](#), will offer an in-depth look into the epic story of the Fabergé name, including the 2014 discovery of a lost imperial egg.

A special Valentine's Day event, [Virtue and Vice](#), will celebrate the opening of the exhibition with cocktails, hors d'oeuvre, and dancing on Saturday, February 14, 2015.

Sponsors

The exhibition is supported by: The Marjorie Merriweather Post Foundation, Ellen MacNeille Charles, Kyra Cheremeteff and Thomas W. Richardson, Dina Merrill Hartley, and General and Mrs. Charles F. Wald.

All exhibitions and programs are funded in part by the U.S. Commission on the Fine Arts through the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs program.

Hillwood Background

When Post cereal heiress, art collector, social figure, and philanthropist Marjorie Merriweather Post left to the public her northwest Washington, D.C. estate, she endowed the country with the most comprehensive collection of [Russian imperial art](#) outside of Russia, an [exquisite 18th-century French decorative art collection](#), and 25 acres of serene landscaped gardens and natural woodlands. Opened as a public institution in 1977, today Hillwood Estate, Museum and Gardens offers a gracious and immersive experience unlike any other. Highlights of the collection include Fabergé eggs, Russian porcelain, Russian orthodox icons, Beauvais tapestries, and Sèvres porcelain, and Post's personal collection of apparel, accessories, and exquisite jewelry. Thirteen acres of enchanting formal gardens include the [Japanese-style Garden](#), [Rose Garden](#), [French Parterre](#), and working greenhouses full of exotic orchids.

GENERAL INFORMATION

What: *Splendor and Surpsrie: Elegant Containers, Antique to Modern*

When: February 15–June 7, 2015

Where: 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC
Metro: VanNess/UDC, Red Line (20 minute walk)

Information: (202) 686-5807 or www.HillwoodMuseum.org
Follow us on Facebook www.Facebook.com/HillwoodMuseum

Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 10am to 5pm. Closed Mondays, most national holidays, and for two weeks in January. Open on Select Sundays throughout the year.

Café: The Café serves lunch Tuesday through Saturday from 11:00am to 3:30pm.
Afternoon Tea is served on Sundays only from 1 to 3:30 pm.
Express Dining, featuring a quick selection of sandwiches, salads, snacks, and beverages (cash only) is available Tuesday through Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm and Sunday from 1 to 4 pm.
Call (202) 686-5807 for café reservations

Suggested Donation: \$15; \$12 for seniors (65 and older); \$10 for college students; \$5 for visitors age 6 to 18. Donation waived for visitors under age 6.

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